

# Teacher Leaders

*U.C.A. 53A-6-115*



Prepared by the  
Utah State Board of Education

November 2016

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## **STATUTORY REQUIREMENT**

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U.C.A. Section 53A-6-115 creates the role of Teacher Leader and requires the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) to solicit recommendations from districts and educators regarding appropriate resources to provide and appropriate ways to compensate a teacher leader. This report must be provided for the Legislative Education Interim Committee on or before the committee's November 2016 interim meeting.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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Teacher leaders maintain classroom-based teaching responsibilities, while also assuming leadership responsibilities outside the classroom. Teacher leaders fundamentally commit to support school and student success through working to maintain current teachers, keeping valuable resources in the classroom.

As required by 53A-6-115, USBE solicited recommendations for appropriate resources and ways to compensate a teacher leader. Districts considered appropriate resources to be:

- providing time for planning and meeting with other teachers;
- a budget to participate in local and national conferences to access the most recent research and developments;
- monetary compensation; and
- payment for courses to increase skills or obtain a higher university degree.

## **BACKGROUND**

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Utah has an urgent need to increase the retention of our teachers and this directly impact's the success of our students. High teacher attrition forces schools to spend greater amounts of school limited resources on recruiting, hiring and inducting new teachers. Currently 15% of teachers leave the Utah education workforce after their first year, on average, while approximately a third of new Utah educators (33-35%) leave the state education workforce within their first three years of teaching and 43-49% depart within 5 years. High teacher attrition can cause problems with educational quality, equity and efficiency. Schools with high-minority, high-poverty, and low-performing students have higher teacher attrition rates.

Rule R277-513 defines roles of a teacher leader. For example, a teacher leader may support school-based professional learning; train, supervise, and mentor student teachers and new teachers; lead specific school improvement initiatives; and act as a liaison for community projects.

The USBE has recently established a teacher licensing taskforce to study Utah's licensing practices. The task force is discussing the proper recognition of teachers leaders in the licensure system.

## **FINDINGS**

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Educators indicated that an important resource they need is time. It takes additional time to plan professional development, collaborate with peers and administrators, coach and visit other classrooms with new teachers, and maintain their own classroom organization, lessons, student growth, etc.

Educators also indicated that monetary payment is the desired method of compensation for the teacher leader role. Some educators suggested a stipend. Others suggested a separate salary schedule. Additional ideas for compensation included having an aide in the classroom, relicensure credit, offering paid time off, and university or other professional learning at no cost to them. One teacher recommended a gift card to enjoy their family time or to purchase books and school supplies. A traditional comment was to offer paid time off for the extra hours worked. One teacher, however, stated that since teacher leaders are also teaching their own class, compensating using this method is actually not an incentive, as it requires more work to prepare for the time off. Some educators reported that their district does not do enough to compensate teacher leaders.

Staff has also reviewed the teacher leadership research. Two findings were most common. First, the establishment of a teacher leader adds to the professionalism of the job and creates a career pathway for teachers to progress and be promoted without leaving the classroom. Second, teachers in Utah and other states are expressing their desire to be more involved in school decisions and affecting policy. Career opportunities and consideration of opinions will increase retention.

### Career Pathway

Giving teachers the opportunity to expand their knowledge about teaching and learning, develop their skills of working with adults, and increase their leadership capacity increase a teacher's positive feelings and professional growth. Teacher

leaders' peers look for support through colleagues that have similar, relevant experience. At the end of a 30-year career, a teacher leaves a classroom in the same position when they entered. Too often, the only avenue for a promotion in position and pay is to move into administration. This sometimes takes our best, most effective teachers out of the classroom. Teachers will be attracted to and continue in the teaching profession if they are rewarded for professional growth and effective teaching through pathways for career opportunities that come with increased leadership responsibilities and increased monetary compensation.

### Teacher Voice

When teachers' opinions and voice are requested and honored, individuals are elevated. Their perspectives are part of distributed leadership, collaboration, and critical changes in the profession. Teachers are ready to work with administrators and policy leaders to create learning and support systems that work for teachers so that they can support their students and increase achievement. When requesting input about how to best compensate a teacher, Allison Riddle, 2014 Utah Teacher of the Year, provided this simple but profound statement, "If we acknowledge the expertise of our teacher leaders, we will retain them and we will also attract and prepare stronger candidates. It's that simple."

### **CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The current role of "teacher leader" is loosely defined and interpreted by Utah teachers and districts as anyone who undertakes a responsibility outside the classroom. This can include a grade level or content-specific chair, participation in the Community Council, providing professional learning for school or district, modeling instruction for peers, being a content-area specialist, mentoring beginning teachers, sharing administrative duties with building principal, representing the school on district- or state-level committees, and others. Though many of these roles put a teacher in a position to lead, many are not strategically clear in expectations, daily work, or their role within the scope of overall school goals and objectives. Honoring teachers' experience and expertise with the ability to move up a career ladder and receive compensation for their time and administrative support creates a sense of self efficacy and empowerment that increases the likelihood of retention of our best and brightest.

USBE staff recommends that LEAs create specific roles for teacher leaders in collaboration with building leaders and teachers. Together they can work within

the confines of code and rule to establish clear expectations, an LEA-specific definition of a teacher leader's role, a selection process, and appropriate compensation. If teachers have a significant voice in the room, the support of the teacher leader role will feel more grass roots, promoting buy in and excitement from the field.

By implementing research-based best practices, the Legislature and the USBE are providing an opportunity to let teachers be heard, acknowledged, honored, and elevated such that they feel that they are perceived as professionals and have a voice at the table.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

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One of the essential expectations of the USBE's Strategic Plan is to promote career pathways that incentivize effective teachers to engage in alternative teacher leadership roles while they remain active in the classroom. Teacher leaders are our exemplary educators with proven skills, desires, and dispositions to provide support and guidance to their colleagues. They are equipped to work with our beginning teachers to build their craft and hone their teaching. By promoting our teacher leaders to positions of growth along a career pathway, we honor our best teachers and their talents. One of the greatest benefits of teacher leaders is to increase the retention of our current teaching force and improve the skills of our new recruits.

Superintendents and district-level leaders representing 24 districts provided face-to-face input and recommendations during a previously scheduled leadership meeting. Initial findings from 81 responses (some districts had more than one participate) are that the teacher leader role has multiple and distinctly unique definitions across districts. Addressing specifically the three roles indicated in 53A-6-115(2), 10 responses asserted utilizing the teacher leader for student teachers and their supervising teacher, including assisting with the training of recently hired teachers and mentoring. Respondents indicated 11 instances assigning their teacher leaders to support school-based professional learning.

Though not specifically mentioned in statute, "Instructional Coach" received 33 assertions of teacher leader responsibilities and the role "Professional Learning" facilitator was mentioned 13 times.

Teachers' input was solicited primarily through email and detailed in the Executive Summary.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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This report was prepared by Jeannie Rowland, Coordinator, Educator Effectiveness in collaboration with Katie Nitka, Educator Specialist, Teaching and Learning and Lisa Brown, Educator Specialist, Licensing, under the direction of Diana Suddreth, Director, Director of Teaching and Learning.